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Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

During the period under review, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa held two ministerial meetings.

At the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh ministerial meetings held in Yaoundé from 3 to 7 September 2007 and Luanda from 13 to 15 May 2008, respectively, the Committee continued its tradition of reviewing, inter alia, the geopolitical and security situation in some States members. Despite significant progress in some countries, the Committee nevertheless noted that the overall security situation in Central Africa remained fragile, because of social tensions, the resurgence of sporadic armed clashes and the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation.

At the twenty-sixth ministerial meeting, the Committee considered cross-border security issues in Central Africa during an extraordinary conference that brought together representatives of States members and of observer institutions and organizations. That initiative allowed States members of the Committee to make recommendations designed to improve cross-border security in Central African countries. At the meeting, the Committee also welcomed the signature, on 18 August 2007, of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs formalizing their cooperation in the implementation of the two components

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of the Sao Tome Initiative, namely the drafting of a legally binding instrument on small arms and light weapons control in Central Africa and a code of conduct for armed and security forces in Central Africa.

At the twenty-seventh ministerial meeting, the Committee continued its consideration of the implementation of the Sao Tome Initiative. It reviewed with interest the feasibility study commissioned by ECCAS on the proposed methodology for the drafting of the aforementioned legal instrument and its plan of action. It also entrusted the Committee secretariat with submitting to it a draft text comprising elements drawn from relevant legal instruments and decided that, in accordance with the agreed time frame, the drafting process should last for two years so that its outcome could be reflected in a resolution to be adopted by the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session. In addition, the Committee welcomed the draft code of conduct for armed and security forces in Central Africa prepared by the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. It undertook to transmit to the secretariat, at the earliest opportunity, comments and any other useful inputs so that the code of conduct could be finalized in time for its adoption at the twenty-eighth ministerial meeting.

The Committee also pursued its efforts to revitalize and streamline its work. In that connection, it asked the secretariat to prepare a paper on the origins, mandate and achievements of the Committee and entrusted Cameroon, in its capacity as ad hoc coordinator, with the preparation of a working paper on the Committee's future prospects; those two documents will be considered together at the twenty-eighth ministerial meeting. The Committee also decided that the financial difficulties affecting the holding of its ministerial meetings would be included on the agenda of the next meeting. Lastly, the Committee reaffirmed its confidence in ECCAS by asking it, within the framework of its partnership with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, to prepare the geopolitical review for the twenty-eighth meeting, as it had done for the twenty-seventh meeting.

In conclusion, the 11 States members of the Committee demonstrated their commitment to strengthening peace and security in the subregion by working together on specific issues. They reaffirmed the importance they attached to the work of the Committee and agreed to take concerted action, with the support of the United Nations and its partners, to implement the decisions taken. To that end, the Committee called on interested States, especially those in a position to do so, to support the implementation of its projects through the United Nations Trust Fund for the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 62/53, the General Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed its support for efforts aimed at promoting confidence-building measures at the regional and subregional levels in order to ease tensions and conflicts in Central Africa and to further sustainable peace, stability and development in the subregion. It also reaffirmed its support for the programme of work of the Standing Advisory Committee adopted at its organizational meeting held in Yaoundé in July 1992 (see A/47/511).

2. By the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide assistance to the States members of the Committee to ensure the continuation of their efforts and further called upon him to submit to it, at its sixty-third session, a report on the implementation of the resolution.

3. The present report is submitted in response to that request. It covers the activities undertaken by the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa from July 2007 to June 2008.

II. Meetings of the Standing Advisory Committee and revitalization of the Committee's working methods

A. Twenty-sixth ministerial meeting of the Committee

4. The twenty-sixth ministerial meeting of the Committee was held in Yaoundé from 3 to 7 September 2007. The following States members participated in the meeting: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe and Chad.

5. The following entities participated as observers: the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA), the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, ECCAS, the African Union, the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, the Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) and the Permanent Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

6. The States members of the Committee considered, inter alia, the following items on the agenda of the meeting:

(a) Review of the geopolitical and security situation in some States members of the Committee, particularly Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo;

(b) Promotion of disarmament and arms limitation programmes in Africa: implementation of the Sao Tome Initiative and implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) in Africa;

(c) Institutional evolution of the subregional peace and security structures and mechanisms in Central Africa;

(d) Cross-border security issues in Central Africa (separate agenda);

(e) Activities of the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

7. The review of the geopolitical and security situation in some States members of the Committee revealed sharp contrasts in developments in Central Africa, particularly in the countries covered by the review, during the period between the twenty-fifth and the twenty-sixth meetings.

8. In that context, and with reference to Burundi, the Committee expressed its deep concern about the deteriorating political, military and security situation in the country. It urged the Government of Burundi and Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu-Forces nationales de libération (Palipehutu-FNL), as well as all other political actors in Burundi, to give priority to dialogue, to continue cooperating closely in a spirit of openness in order to find solutions to all outstanding issues and to take, in good faith, all the necessary steps to ensure the full implementation of the Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement concluded by the Government of Burundi and Palipehutu-FNL.

9. The Committee also called on the countries involved in the Regional Initiative for Peace in Burundi and the facilitation team to take all necessary steps to ensure that Palipehutu-FNL chose the way of peace once and for all. It encouraged the Government of Burundi to redouble its efforts to strengthen the democratic process in Burundi, in particular by pursuing dialogue with the political parties, cooperating with civil society, ensuring respect for the rule of law and human rights, including freedom of expression and the press, and promoting national reconciliation.

10. The Committee welcomed the climate of peace and stability that prevailed in Cameroon and commended the Cameroonian Government for its efforts to complete the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. It expressed concern, however, at the growing cross-border insecurity in Cameroon and commended the Cameroonian security forces for the successful outcome of their operations, in particular those to stop roadblockers.

11. The Committee also welcomed the stated willingness of the Government and other parties in the Central African Republic to engage in an inclusive political dialogue open to all with a view to finding a solution to the situation obtaining in the country. On the other hand, it expressed serious concern at the continuing precariousness of the security situation and, in particular, at the repeated rebel attacks on towns in northern Central African Republic and the numerous human rights violations resulting from such attacks and from the reprisals carried out by government security forces.

12. The Committee welcomed the decision taken by the United Nations to deploy a multidisciplinary operation along the borders of the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan and, in that connection, expressed support for the new concept of operations presented by the Secretary-General. It likewise welcomed the European Union's decision to establish an operation that would support the United Nations presence in eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic.

13. While welcoming the significant positive developments in the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Committee nevertheless expressed deep concern at the deterioration of the military and security situation in

the eastern part of the country, in particular at the armed clashes between the armed forces and rebel groups and the fighting between rival militias in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. The Committee called on the armed groups to turn in their weapons and to participate unconditionally in the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation process. It also invited the Government to develop, in collaboration with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), a comprehensive plan to ensure security in the eastern part of the country, inter alia by putting an end to impunity and promoting the holding of the Conference on Peace and Security in North and South Kivu, as initially recommended.

14. Following the adoption, at the twenty-fifth ministerial meeting, of the Sao Tome Initiative (which includes provision for the drafting of a legally binding instrument on the control of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa and the drafting of a code of conduct for defence and security forces in Central Africa), the Committee welcomed the signature, on 18 August 2007, of a Memorandum of Understanding between ECCAS and the Office for Disarmament Affairs on its implementation of the Initiative. It also expressed satisfaction with the proposed methodology, which provides for the simultaneous drafting of a legally binding instrument on the control of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa and of the related action plan, together with *travaux préparatoires*.

15. The Committee also considered cross-border security issues in Central Africa during an extraordinary conference organized jointly by ECCAS and the Government of Cameroon. That extraordinary conference brought together representatives of States members and of observer institutions and organizations. The conference made recommendations on ways and means of strengthening cross-border security in the Central African subregion.

16. The Committee also welcomed the conclusion, in December 2006, of peace agreements between the Government of Chad and certain major factions of the political-military opposition, as well as the ongoing inter-Chadian dialogue with the political opposition that had been initiated on 8 February 2007 by the presidential majority and its allies and had resulted in the signature, on 13 August 2007, of an agreement on the strengthening of the democratic process in Chad. However, the Committee expressed its deep concern at the continuing precariousness of the military and security situation in the eastern region of Chad including, in particular, the ongoing proliferation of small arms and the development of cross-border banditry.

17. Lastly, as it had done at the twenty-fifth ministerial meeting, the Committee welcomed and expressed its appreciation for the efforts undertaken and the progress made in implementing the early warning mechanism for Central Africa, and the development of the capacities and other conflict prevention and crisis management tools of the ECCAS secretariat.

B. Twenty-seventh ministerial meeting of the Committee

18. The twenty-seventh ministerial meeting of the Committee was held in Luanda from 13 to 15 May 2008. The following States members participated in the meeting: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo, the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe and Chad.

19. The following entities participated as observers: BONUCA, ECCAS, the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, the Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa and OIF.

20. The States members of the Committee considered, inter alia, the following items on the agenda of the meeting:

(a) Review of the geopolitical and security situation in some States members of the Committee, particularly Burundi, the Central African Republic, Congo and Chad, along with the report on the Bahr el Gazal joint military exercise;

(b) Promotion of disarmament and arms limitation programmes in Africa:

(i) Proliferation of small arms and light weapons and disarmament of civilian populations;

(ii) Briefing by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs: implementation of the Sao Tome Initiative; preparations for the 2008 biennial meeting on the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects; Nairobi workshop on the promotion of the International Tracing Instrument (10-11 December 2007); Gaborone workshop on implementing Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) in Africa (27-28 November 2007);

(c) Institutional evolution of the subregional peace and security structures and mechanisms in Central Africa (status of ratification of the protocol on the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa);

(d) Report on the activities of the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

21. In accordance with the adopted agenda, the delegations of Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo reported on the geopolitical and security situation in their respective countries. The Committee also took note of the statement made by the delegation of Cameroon describing the situation in that country.

22. With regard to Burundi, the Committee took note of the formation of a new Government following the reshuffle of 14 November 2007, which allowed for the strict application of article 129 of the Constitution, as demanded by some political parties represented in the National Assembly. It condemned the attacks perpetrated by Palipehutu-FNL against innocent populations in the capital, Bujumbura, in violation of the ceasefire agreement signed on 7 September 2006. The Committee also urged the Government of Burundi, Palipehutu-FNL and all other political actors to give priority to dialogue. It appealed once again to the international community and donors to provide Burundi with all the support necessary to tackle the serious socio-economic and security problems facing the country.

23. The Committee took note with satisfaction of the recent signing in Libreville, on 9 May 2008, of a ceasefire and peace agreement between the Government of the Central African Republic and the Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie. The agreement was concluded under the auspices of Mr. El Hadj Omar

Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic, in his capacity as Chairman of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community ad hoc committee on Central African issues, and in the presence of Mr. François Lonseny Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic.

24. The Committee again expressed deep concern at the persistent insecurity, caused in particular by the roadblockers active in the north of the country, and at acts of violence against civilians. It also expressed concern at the presence of elements of the Ugandan rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army in the south-east of the Central African Republic and at the use of that part of national territory as a crossing-point to neighbouring countries.

25. The Committee also expressed concern at the deterioration of relations between Chad and the Sudan and called on both countries to re-establish dialogue, which should facilitate African Union joint mediation efforts and the implementation of the Dakar Agreement. It took note of the signing of a non-aggression and peace agreement by the Presidents of Chad and the Sudan on 13 March 2008, under the auspices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and expressed satisfaction at the deployment in eastern Chad, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1778 (2007), of a multidimensional force composed of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) and a European Union operation mandated to provide security to Sudanese refugee camps and humanitarian workers.

26. The Committee welcomed the signature on 23 January 2008, by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the rebel armed groups, of the Goma act of engagement and of the Amani programme for peace, pacification, stability and development in the provinces of North and South Kivu; it urged all parties to work in good faith towards the prompt implementation of those instruments.

27. It also welcomed the Nairobi joint communiqué signed on 10 November 2007 by the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, which set out a common approach to ending the threat to peace and stability in both countries and in the Great Lakes region.

28. However, the Committee expressed deep concern at the deteriorating security situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the Ituri region, and called on the armed groups to turn in their weapons and participate unconditionally in the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation process.

29. The Committee also took note of the information provided by the Cameroonian delegation on the peace and security situation in that country. It welcomed the fact that the measures taken recently by the Cameroonian authorities to improve the population's purchasing power, particularly the reduction of tariffs on essential commodities and the increase in government employees' salaries, had significantly contributed to reducing social tensions.

30. However, the Committee expressed concern at the ongoing criminal activities of roadblockers in some border areas in Cameroon, and called on security forces in that country to pursue their efforts to combat that phenomenon, in concert with neighbouring countries.

31. The twenty-seventh ministerial meeting allowed the Committee to move forward with the implementation of the Sao Tome Initiative. The Committee took note of the presentation of the ECCAS-commissioned study on the proposed methodology for the drafting and adoption of the legal instrument on the control of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa and its plan of action. It encouraged its secretariat to provide, at its next meeting, a draft text containing elements drawn from relevant legal instruments. The Committee also took note with interest of the preliminary draft code of conduct for defence and security forces in Central Africa submitted by the Office for Disarmament Affairs. It undertook to transmit its comments to the secretariat along with input designed to finalize the drafting process with a view to adopting the code at the twenty-eighth meeting.

32. Lastly, the Committee welcomed the progress achieved and the measures taken by ECCAS in the areas of mediation, combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, child protection and human trafficking prevention, promotion and protection of human rights, electoral assistance to States members, crisis prevention and resolution, and operational capacity-building for the early warning mechanism for Central Africa. It also took note with interest of the activity report submitted by the Director of the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, and welcomed the broader partnership between the Centre and the States of the subregion in the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy in Central Africa and the follow-up to those issues.

C. Revitalization of the Committee's working methods and inputs from the Office for Disarmament Affairs

33. At the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh ministerial meetings, the Committee pursued the process of revitalizing and streamlining its working methods. It took note of improved synergies with ECCAS and other United Nations bodies such as the Security Council.

34. Within the framework of its partnership with the Office for Disarmament Affairs, ECCAS prepared, for the first time, the working paper that served as the basis for the discussion of the geopolitical review at the twenty-seventh ministerial meeting; as a result of that experience, the Committee once again entrusted ECCAS with the task of drafting a similar paper for the twenty-eighth ministerial meeting.

35. In addition, the Office for Disarmament Affairs contributed to the Committee's work by giving briefings on a number of disarmament-related issues, including the preparations for the July 2008 biennial meeting on the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which will focus in particular on illicit brokering, marking, tracing, stockpile management, assistance and cooperation; promotion of the universality of the International Tracing Instrument; promotion of the universality of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its Protocols; and implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) in Africa.

36. The Committee took note of the communication prepared by the Office for Disarmament Affairs on the Security Council meeting held on 30 April 2008 to consider the first report of the Secretary-General to the Council on issues relating to

small arms and light weapons (S/2008/258) and the 13 recommendations made in the report. It expressed satisfaction with the fact that the Republic of the Congo had informed the Security Council of the project relating to the drafting of a legally binding instrument on the control of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa.

37. With regard to its working methods, the Committee once again commended the Office for Disarmament Affairs for its efforts to revitalize the Committee's work. In particular, it encouraged the Office to hold regular informal consultations with the permanent representatives of States members in New York. Indeed, the Committee takes the view that such informal consultations offer States members the opportunity to become more involved in its work, to develop relevant guidelines in a more efficient manner and to discuss the preparations for upcoming meetings, thereby allowing for more active participation by their national authorities. The Committee also asked the secretariat to prepare a concept paper on the origins, mandate and achievements of the Committee, and appointed Cameroon ad hoc coordinator for the preparation of a working paper on the Committee's future prospects; those two documents will be considered at the Committee's twenty-eighth ministerial meeting. Lastly, the Committee decided to include the question of its financial difficulties on the agenda of that meeting.

III. Administrative and financial matters

38. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued to fund the two ministerial meetings from the regular budget.

39. At the conclusion of the biennium 2007-2008, around US$ 10,000 will remain in the Trust Fund for the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has briefed the Committee on the financial difficulties it is facing in organizing the twenty-eighth ministerial meeting, which is due to be held in Libreville. The Committee decided to include that issue on the agenda of the twenty-eighth ministerial meeting. In that connection, the Secretary-General reiterates his appeal to Member States and intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations and invites them to contribute to the Trust Fund so that the Committee can pursue its programme of activities.

IV. Conclusions and observations

40. **During the period under review, the two meetings organized by the Committee enabled States members to share information and experiences relating to the efforts undertaken in the areas of crisis management, conflict resolution and the strengthening of peace and security in countries emerging from conflict in Central Africa. The organization by the Committee of an extraordinary conference on cross-border security issues illustrates States members' determination to establish lasting security in the subregion and to make the best use of the opportunities for concerted action offered by the Committee.**

41. **The twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh ministerial meetings also offered States members of the Committee the opportunity to discuss enhancing the**

impact of their work. As part of the efforts to rationalize the Committee's working methods, closer and more regular cooperation with the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the permanent representatives of States members has allowed States to provide the Committee with clearer policy guidance and to become more involved in both its programme of work and the preparations for ministerial meetings. Similarly, the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding between the ECCAS secretariat and the Office for Disarmament Affairs has contributed to the strengthening of cooperation between the two bodies, particularly as regards the joint implementation of the Sao Tome Initiative and the drafting of the geopolitical review.

42. In conclusion, the 11 States members of the Committee reaffirmed their commitment to using the diplomatic and policy forum offered by the Committee to discuss concerns relating to the subregion and to adopt specific preventive measures and measures to strengthen peace and security. They reaffirmed their willingness to meet twice a year, in accordance with the agreed rotation principle and also to meet, as necessary, to discuss urgent issues or specific questions.

43. The ongoing efforts to revitalize the Committee's work illustrate the relevance and adaptability of the body. The States members are aware of the Committee's importance and are committed to working together, with the support of the United Nations and its partners, to implement the decisions taken. In that connection, the Committee calls on interested States, especially those in a position to do so, to help it to finance the implementation of specific projects through the Trust Fund for the Standing Advisory Committee.